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Democracy

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DO you remember when Catholics were all on fire about social justice? Can your mind go back to the years when the country was in a deep depression and we were all saying that it was the end of an economic era, and that a reconstruction of the social order was the only thing that would save us? Those were the days when any speaker who could tell us what *Quadragesimo Anno* (remember it?) meant was in great demand, when study clubs were springing up all over the land for discussions on economics and its relations with the moral order.

Somehow those days seem very far away from me now. We don't seem to be so much worried about such things any more. I think I can tell, for I follow the Catholic press pretty closely. I see what the editors are thinking about, what the recent speakers think will interest their audiences, what the controversies are about. And the old days, not so very long ago, seem very far away.

THE GLOW HAS FADED

What was it took our minds off those things? Was it the war with its terrible news of the slaughter of

noncombatants and the destruction of once fair and prosperous cities? Is it the apprehension that this war will reach us on these shores or at least draw us over into its maelstrom? Or was it the heat of that strange and exciting campaign for the Presidency and Congress that we went through, when nearly everything but the real issue was debated publicly by the candidates? Is it that we grow tired of anything when we have heard it often enough? Or is it, perhaps, that when the devil is sick the devil a monk would be, but when the devil is well, the devil a monk is he? In other words, when things look black, do we think only then about new orders and all that, but when we pull slowly back to prosperity, do we come to think that maybe after all we can get along pretty well as we were?

I don't profess to know the answers to all these questions. Maybe it is all of those things. But of one fact I am sure, and that is that the first eager glow of enthusiasm about social justice has faded from our minds. We have gone to other things, and now the whole business looks like a fad, like mah jongg, like miniature golf, like Chinese checkers, like last year's movie. . . . We are worried about other things now.

What are those other things? Well, among them are peace, foreign entanglements, dictatorship, defense; and everybody is talking about democracy and can it survive?

Those are pretty big subjects, easily as big as social justice. But there is one thing nearly all of them have in common: there is very little we can do about them. If it depended on us to keep the peace, the peace would be kept, and we would perhaps never be in a war. But when a war is raging, and especially such a war as this, a world revolution in arms, then there is not much we can do about it. We can take certain precautions—and we took those at the beginning with our Neutrality Act—but after we have done that, and no matter what else we do, it still remains entirely

possible for us to be drawn into it, just as were so many other countries which had no intention of mixing up with it. Hence our further precautions of rearmament and conscription.

I said that nearly all the things we are worrying about lie outside of our ability to solve. But one of them does not. That is democracy and its capacity to survive. It will survive if we will it to survive, and if we take precautions to make it survive. And it may be, as will appear, that there is a closer connection between social justice and the survival of democracy than we may think.

But first let us get our minds clear about democracy. There are so many meanings given to the word nowadays that there is grave danger of its ultimately losing all meaning whatsoever. I have seen it written (with a certain amount of plausibility) that Communism is democracy. It has even been said that Nazi-Fascism is democracy! To some people democracy is just a form of government, self-government, representative government, parliamentary government, as distinct from some form of absolutism. To other people, democracy is a state of mind, a be-good-to-your-neighbor, mind-your-own-business kind of public behavior.

WHERE SOME OF OUR DIFFICULTIES LIE

Now of these four ideas, the last two come near being right. The first two are too absurd to argue—Communism and Nazi-Fascism are both absolutist forms of government, and they never would pretend to be anything else if there were not still some democrats in the world whom it is necessary to blind and win over. But it is true that democracy in its true sense is self-government as a form of rule, and that it also includes within its meaning the idea of government for the common good.

Just there lie some of our difficulties. Every form of just government is government for the common good. If it is not that, it is not government, but tyranny. You don't have democracy by the mere fact that you govern for the common good. You don't even have democracy by the mere fact that you have representative government. In the Middle Ages, which to some unenlightened souls are still ages of despotism and darkness, the kingship was representative government. The king was merely the representative of the community, exercising its authority in its name. If he stopped doing that, he simply stopped being king.

The fact is that there are some things which are common to all good kinds of government. If you could resurrect some good soul out of the Middle Ages, say Saint Thomas Aquinas, and if you told him that we had democracy in this country because our government was a representative one, because it was supposed to govern for the common, not anybody's private, good, and because the least of the citizens, not only the rich and powerful, had the full protection of the laws, he would look at you with amazement. He would exclaim: "Why, any kind of government is supposed to be that; not only democracy!"

Now this is not a mere academic question, to be argued about between scholars in learned magazines and in the classrooms. It is a highly practical question. It has fallen to my lot in recent months to be present at meetings between experts in government and to hear them make speeches, and to make some myself, and I have trembled for the future of our American institutions when I did so. Most of these men are thoroughly convinced of the necessity of equal justice among men, of the common good as the goal of government, of decency and even charity as the soul of politics, and they think that is democracy. The result is, of course, that they will be ready to accept any *form* of government so long as it has those qualities. They would accept

even Nazism if they became convinced that it fulfilled those specifications.

DO THE PEOPLE RULE ?

On the other hand, I listened to some, not all, of the speeches that were made during the last political campaign. I got the impression that many of their makers were under the impression that when government has very few powers, that is democracy, but when it has many powers, that is dictatorship. And I can't say that those who undertook to answer them were any better off; they gave anything but the right answer.

Now let us get this thing straight. The amount of authority possessed by a government is not the measure of its democracy. That is another theory altogether: the theory of economic liberalism, of individualism, so bitterly condemned by Pope Pius XI in his various Encyclicals. It is a theory that leads to every kind of injustice and oppression, as we were saying in those far-off days.

The test of a democracy is, on the other hand, not whether it fulfils the general requisites of every good form of government: rule for the common good, equal justice, representative rule. You can have an absolute king, and if he does all those things he is a good ruler, but he is not the head of a democracy. The test of a democracy is something entirely different.

The test of a democracy is whether the people rules itself.

Now notice that that statement says two things: that the *people* rules, and that it *rules*. Rule, therefore, is one of the elements, and who exercises the rule is the other. Rule is common to all governments; rule by the people is what makes it a democracy. The amount of rule that is exercised in a democracy has nothing to do with it. If it is a rule of the people, exercised for the people, by the people, then we have democ-

racy. The rule may be great or less, as circumstances demand, but it is democracy. This rule must be for the common good, under it there must be equal justice, it must be representative of the community's authority; but so must every rule, not only a democracy. These latter are common qualities of every just form of government.

Now notice the double danger from which our democracy is threatened. One comes from the professors, the theoretical men; the other comes from the politicians, the practical men.

The theoretical danger is not immediately pressing. It may become pressing later on, when their ideas have trickled down through their students into the legislative halls, but at present it is just one of those dangers in the future, maybe the near future, against which we should be warned. The danger is this: you take the common qualities of all good kinds of government, and you call that democracy. You then introduce another form of government than rule by the people, and you call it democracy. Then you adopt that form of government, under the impression fostered by the professors that it is democracy, and lo, you have lost your democracy. Under that system, we could get any kind of government: Communism, Fascism, Nazism, or what have you. Democracy, of course, must have those common qualities of equal justice, decency, and the rest, but it isn't democracy just because it has. Nor do I say that Nazism and Communism and Fascism actually possess those qualities; but they claim to have them, and they always will come before us promising them to us.

FALSE DEMOCRACY RUINED FRANCE

It seems to me that the practical danger is more pressing, and it may be that it is this danger that answers the questions with which this article began. The

practical danger begins also by giving us another definition of democracy than the right one. To those who hold this definition democracy is the minimum of government, and the less the government the better the democracy. I have already said that this is not democracy at all, but economic liberalism, a very different thing. It has caused much harm in the world. It really caused the downfall of France, a democracy, and it brought the British Empire close to ruin. While the totalitarian governments were really ruling, the democracies were trying to get by through ruling as little as possible. The result was that when force openly became the dominant and decisive factor in European affairs, the governments that ruled had a vast advantage over those that refused to rule.

Not only that. A still worse thing happened. All kinds of people, liberals as well as conservatives, representatives of the masses as well as of money, denounced the theory of rule as Fascism, as if Fascism was the only theory of government that upheld the right of a government to rule. That is not true, but extremists of both sides have urged it, for their own purposes, one merely selfish and the other—shall I say diabolical? We can see what the results of that have been in Europe.

Now observe how this false notion has operated in our own country. Many years ago the plutocrats of England formulated the idea that the very essence of liberty, and therefore of democracy, lay in the government's allowing economic forces—business, commerce, money—the fullest possible play. Freedom to this group meant no interference with anybody in the process of making money. Government should simply keep its hands off and allow economic forces to have the freest possible action. They formulated the theory in the saying that that government governs best which governs least.

Now this theory, and the saying that goes along

with it, was most severely reprobated by Pope Pius XI in his famous Encyclical, even more severely, in fact, than its opposite, Socialism. To this theory the Pope attributed nearly all our modern ills. He said:

Just as the unity of human society cannot be built upon class warfare, so the proper ordering of economic affairs cannot be left to free competition alone. From this source have proceeded in the past all the errors of the "Individualistic" school. This school, ignorant or forgetful of the social and moral aspects of economic matters, teaches that the State should refrain in theory and practice from interfering therein, because these possess in free competition and open markets a principle of self-direction better able to control them than any created intellect. Free competition, however, though within certain limits just and productive of good results, cannot be the ruling principle of the economic world. This has been abundantly proved by the consequences that have followed from the free rein given to these dangerous individualistic ideals.

Later he says: "Free competition and still more economic domination must be kept within just and definite limits, and must be brought under the effective control of the public authority, in matters appertaining to the latter's competence." The reason why he added "economic domination" to competition as things that must be brought under social control is that he easily proved that in our days competition naturally led to something else, in fact its opposite. For free competition, he says, "permits the survival only of those who are the strongest, which often means those who fight most relentlessly, who pay least heed to the dictates of conscience." Thus out of competition we get what he calls the dominant note of our modern life, economic dictatorship, control of human destiny and of the State itself by those who hold most of the money.

PRESIDENT IS NOT GOVERNMENT

Thus it happened that the Pope said that when he spoke of a reconstruction of the social order, he had

the State most in mind; he wanted its emancipation from control by business interests; he wanted the States, through its government, to reassert its right to rule.

Now in this country there have always been those who looked upon laws giving the executive more power over business as an undue extension of power in the hands of the President, and hence contrary to the spirit of our Constitution, and hence destructive of democracy. Those who argue this way are forgetful of the fact that the executive power, the President, is not the government. Our government is a threefold thing: the Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court. All three are our rulers, in our name, not any one of them. Congress makes the laws which we must obey; the President enforces them; the Supreme Court protects us against both unconstitutional laws and unjust enforcement.

Every law that Congress passes gives the President more power, in one sense. But it does not give him any more power than it gives him. If he usurps any more, the Courts are there to protect us. All three together are our government. In the maintaining of this division of the power of rule lies the security of our republican form of government.

RELATION OF LAW TO POWER

Moreover, this republican form of government is also democratic. The Congress does not make the laws in its own name, but in ours, whom it is elected to represent. The Supreme Court does not pass upon the laws in its own name, or out of its own power or personal notions, but in our name. It also represents us. And when the President is given the power to enforce these laws, he does not have that power as a sovereign in his own right. He substitutes for us, as do the Congress and the Courts. In a true sense, therefore, when the

President is given any power, Mr. So-and-so, who happens to be in the White House, does not have the power; we have it. We had it all along, of course; we simply chose to formulate it in certain words, so that all may know beforehand what they have to do.

Now these are simple notions, known to every high-school boy or girl who studies civics. But they are often forgotten by grown men and women. They may be forgotten by a President, and if they are, Congress and the Courts call him back to right order. They may be and often are forgotten by ordinary people, who lament the passing of democracy because Congress has given the President more power, that is, more laws to enforce. They seem to think that because this has happened, they have actually alienated their power, by putting it into other hands. They have not, of course, done that, for the President, in the first place, is not an alien person, outside and above the community, but a part of it; and in the second place, the President is not the government, but only a third part of it; and in the third place, the government is only a substitute for the people, for purely practical reasons, as the writers of the *Federalist* pointed out in the beginning.

Now all these three truths are quite well known to people who study government in the classroom as a theoretical matter. But to many people, in fact to the people itself, these past months, it seems to me, they have been largely unknown, or at least forgotten by them. And the danger of this ignorance or forgetfulness is, it also seems to me, very great. For if the people itself comes to imagine that, when Congress passes more laws giving more power to the executive branch of our government, the people itself has lost that power into the hands of some overlord, then the President may himself come to imagine the same thing. Then we *would* have a dictatorship. The people itself would have changed its form of government. It is as easy as that.

What is the cure for this danger? Pass less laws holding within bounds the economic dictatorship which Pius XI in 1931 called the "dominant characteristic of modern society"? Obviously not. Pope Pius also called this dictatorship "a headstrong and vehement power, which, if it is to prove beneficial to mankind, needs to be curbed strongly and ruled with prudence." To curb it, he said, there is need of a spirit of justice, and this justice, he said, "must build up a juridical and social order able to pervade all economic activity." There must be a social order, and this social order must be based upon a juridical order, namely, one of laws.

Does this mean that, to have this juridical and social order, we must abandon our democratic form of government; or else give up any further social legislation? We do not have to take either alternative. But we will have to take one or other of them if the people get the notion that democracy means less rule. During the last election campaign, one side definitely adopted this notion. And the other side, in my opinion, did not sufficiently repudiate it.

That is a very ominous situation. If that position is once universally adopted by our people, then our form of government will have changed without our knowing it. For our form of government depends on our theory of government. If we adopt the theory that power deposited in the executive has departed from the people, then we no longer have a democracy, but some form of dictatorship. Yet the last election showed signs that this is actually happening. The party out of power adopted the position that social legislation gives too much power to the executive, as if the executive is not a part of the community, and is, in fact, the whole government, over and above the community. That position is an alien one, derived from foreign theories. The party in power, as I said, did not sufficiently repudiate it. Let us call them both back to reality.

AS LONG AS THE PEOPLE RULE

The point is, of course, that when social legislation is passed designed to curb economic dictatorship and make the money power serve the common good, and not private purses, it is still the people who wield the power. It is still a democratic state. Selfish interests, taking the name of liberty in vain for private privilege, will have it that we have abandoned democracy. I do not think that our people believe that. We will have abandoned it only when we hold that democracy exists when government has very few powers, and that dictatorship comes in when it has many. It will still be democracy, no matter how many powers it has, as long as the people has them, and government is merely its substitute. The people will have them, as long as it understands the truth.

* * * *

FORMALISM

Formalism in religion is a mechanical process by which the action of mind is transferred to muscle: prayer to the lips, charity to the hands, punctuality to the legs, devotion to the knees, resignation to the eyes, humility to the neck. The body, instead of being the assistant of the mind, becomes its substitute. Certain actions, like eating, dressing, reading, writing and playing, must follow this process of habit or muscular substitution to save time; but when religion is made to follow this process, it ceases to be religion and degenerates into mechanics. Repetition is religion's worst pitfall, for it creates muscular habits; these release the mind which goes wool-gathering and religion evaporates. Habits in saying Mass, in receiving the Sacraments, in saying prayers, are a source of mental paralysis; they produce torpor, which needs constant punches in the ribs to force the mind to take the lead. Tibetans put their prayers in a revolving drum, which they turn, to let their prayers move and speak for them. And we laugh at them; but are we often any better? The saintly Canon Carey, of Westminster, did not think so, for when he was dying he remarked to a friend who ventured to congratulate him on a well-spent life: "I am not altogether happy; for there has been too much of formalism in my life."—*Holy Roodlets*.

Christocracy

JOSEPH F. SCHEUER, C.P.P.S.

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KICK the world from under you. Stay for a brief moment just above it and survey the countries of the earth. You see a stunning paradox. Below lies a land consecrated to pleasure, boasting of material prosperity, exulting in progress; yet living a philosophy of despair, suffering starvation, entrenching itself in barbarism. There are tumbling farmsteads dotting oceans of fertile fields; rich mines of unborn wealth choking gaunt and haggard cities. Midas multiplied in millions! Men buried in gold and starved for food!

This is the problem of poverty in the midst of plenty, the riddle of misery in prosperity, the paradox of progress and regress issuing from modern warfare. While problems, riddles, and paradoxes are all right as long as they remain on paper, they have quite a different effect upon those whose lot it is to face them in cold actuality. Then they beget a kind of social heart disease sometimes called the "fatalism of the multitude," a peculiarly cringing defeatism. People begin to sense a certain insignificance in the individual person. They begin to imagine that the affairs of men are swayed by forces too mighty for individual effort. This is a critical and hazardous attitude, for just as soon as individual persons lose sight of their ability to impress themselves upon the things about them, they become choice victims for the altars of the Totalitarian State.

Sickness of the heart can be cured only by treating the heart. Merely changing the position of the head, arms, or feet will never right the ill. Neither in a world so heart-stricken as ours can mere schemes be effective. The evils of our day, especially defeatism,

skepticism, and opportunism, have so multiplied that the creation of new and effective immediate machinery is impossible. A solution must be sought at the heart: in a new mood, a new outlook, a new spirit. It must be the fruit of the seeds of truth sown deep in the heart and mind, not of utopias hung loosely in the imagination.

Catholic sociologists are the only ones who as a group recognize the need for what are almost revolutionary changes in social and economic viewpoint. This does not mean that they are promoting a new political or economic panacea. They respect the traditional forms of government, whether republican or monarchic, and subscribe unhesitatingly to approved norms of economics. But they are unique in this that they are far more basic. The truly healthy society must be built upon a principle, an ideal, a new spirit. Any other procedure is destined for failure. And while such a principle or spirit must of necessity be adapted to particular circumstances and conditions, there are certain of its aspects which hold universally. It must affect the entire concept, first of the individual in himself, then in his relation to others and their relations to him in return, and finally, of the State, which is the guiding and directing factor.

PRIMACY OF PERSON AND FAMILY

Well ordered society begins with the individual person, for it is only in virtue of the human person's social character that society can exist at all. For almost four hundred years society has been imbued with the spirit of rugged individualism. A man is no more than an isolated thing to be fully exploited in the production of wealth. He is an aimless derationalized atom pushing and being pushed by others quite as aimless as himself. Since the latter half of the last century and especially since the first World War this spirit has been spinning

itself into the last stages of its development in the ideology of the Totalitarians.¹ Men are all but dehumanized, soulless, senseless, chained by the millions to an absolute subservience to the State. In either case *individuality* is emphasized: a man is nothing more than a single member of the species *homo*. This materialistic, selfish notion of man is bound to lead ultimately and quickly to a denial of his social character.

Christian social action postulates a concept of man which when placed over against the above seems almost visionary. Not man's individuality, but his *personality*, is the thing of importance. Man is a person and, therefore, in the order of nature possesses intellect and will. He can distinguish ends and choose means to obtain them. In consequence, he has a right to the satisfaction of his legitimate desires and a duty to respect similar rights in others. In the order of supernature he is a member of a chosen race, a kingly priesthood. He is possessed by his Creator, penetrated with His light and life. Victimized by the boundless fecundity of Divine love, he is brought to a second birth whereby he shares God's own nature, an adopted son in Christ Jesus, through the Holy Ghost.²

Two such persons unite in matrimony, and in mutual love cooperate with their Creator in peopling heaven and earth. Thus arises the family, a natural society, the smallest organized unit of civil society. Only when millions of these tiny cells are healthy can the body, the State, be healthy; therefore, the State has a duty to facilitate and further all that tends to the benefit and stability of the family. The family must never be considered apart from the individual person, because it owes its very existence to the most urgent needs and deepest tendencies of the individual personality.

¹ Fanfani, A., *Catholicism, Protestantism, Capitalism*, pp. 91 ff.

² Guardini, R., *The Church and the Catholic*, p. 33.

CORPORATE OR VOCATIONAL GROUPS ³

A man lives first for himself and his family. But, secondarily, nature has formed him to dwell in society. Besides his own personal benefits, then, he must also seek the good of those around him. Like a pendulum his interests must swing between two extremes: self and other-selves. Both factors have a claim to legitimate satisfaction; neither suffers independently of the other.

When a pendulum swings rhythmically back and forth it moves the entire mechanism into harmonious action. Just as soon, however, as it becomes unduly attached to one extreme or the other disorder arises. *Laissez-faire* and Totalitarianism do just that in regard to personal and social interests. *Laissez-faire* became stuck on selfishness, and so forced men to abandon a rhythmic harmony with their fellowmen. The pendulum was swinging through only half its arc. Totalitarianism stuck at the other extreme! It sees only state selfishness: a monotony on state, state, state, and so it too cannot produce harmony. In the first we find agglomerations of self-seekers; questionable political parties, each pulling and fighting for their own devotees like hoodlums in a gang war; labor unions and employers' associations whose leaders usually seek to fill their own pockets rather than help put something into the pockets of others; colossal Trust combinations, economic dinosaurs which not infrequently come to rule their masters. In the second, matters are about the same except that now those who really gain are fewer; the controllers of the State reap where the masses have sown.

The true way out is to really acknowledge both the individual's interests and the common welfare and harmonize them—they are never quite so opposed as some

³ Scheuer, J., *Corporate Society*, Nuntius Aulæ, XXIII (July, 1940), 137-143.

extremists would have us believe. This is the task of the Corporations or Vocational groups, which are nothing more than "the different occupations in which men are engaged, organized so that they may adequately collaborate with the State in promoting national well-being."⁴ Such bodies are legally constituted intermediaries between persons and state. They are recognized by law and hence their decisions have the force of law. Their first duty is the guarantee of common welfare and individual well-being within a given occupation. Each corporation is responsible for its own corporate life, as were the Medieval Guilds. It must protect all those engaged in the branch of activity in which it is concerned; it must see that they are adequately rewarded for their work; it must defend their rights, aid them in performing their duties; it must provide for them in times of misfortune.⁵ These Corporations regulate economic life to obtain the maximum benefit of consumer as well as producer, a thing almost entirely unheard of in our time. But economic life is not their only concern: professional, social, and religious interests are also adequately represented.

A hierarchical order is founded within the State; local groups blend into regional, and regional groups into national. The interests of individuals, cliques, and factions must not precede common interests; nor must higher organizations prosper at the expense of the lower. Just as society exists for the good of the individual person, and the individual person needs society for the greatest development of his faculties; so the larger vocational groups must be the servants of the lesser groups while these must be constantly mindful of the common good. The entire must be balanced and counterbalanced. In no case must larger groups be allowed to perform what might just as easily and efficiently be performed by the smaller groups.

⁴ Derrick, M., *The Portugal of Salazar*, pp. 61 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*

THE STATE

The position of the State in such an order of things is one of regulation, direction, coordination and stimulation. It must promote unity throughout the nation by safeguarding harmony among the occupational groups, taking care especially of the less favored. It may not, however, interfere in the activity assigned to any particular organ except if this should break down entirely. The State will have far less jurisdiction than it has at present because most of the burdens which it now bears will be shifted to the shoulders of those who are more closely concerned with them, namely, the intermediary groups. Hence the Corporate order makes for an extension of democratic ideals by slackening the modern trends toward bureaucracy and dictatorship.

A society based upon this conception of human personality, and organized into a hierarchy of vocational groups under the guidance of the State is said to be *organic*. Perhaps the better way to describe it is to say that it is *cooperative*. In the human body, the eye, ear, mouth, and other organs are not acting only for their own individual benefits; their operations are destined directly or indirectly for the good of each other. Similarly Corporate Society: one part works in union with the other for the benefit and progress of each other. The butcher does not grow fat at the expense of the baker; nor does the baker feast by hoodwinking the candlestick maker. No one gains unless each realizes that he needs the work of the other. That is why Pius XI could say: "Unless human society forms a social and organized body; unless labor be protected in the social juridical order; unless the various forms of human endeavor, dependent on one another, are united in mutual harmony and mutual support; unless, above all, brains, capital, and labor combine for common effort, man's toil cannot produce fruit."⁶

⁶ *Quadragesimo Anno*.

CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY

Again, something more than a mere apathetic gesture of unity must pervade the organism. Sullen lines of pickets, marching masses of steel-girded soldiers, huddled crowd of civilians in the ruins of a bomb-torn village, experience a sense of unity. These are *brotherhoods* indeed! But they are brotherhoods born of hate and injustice and nourished by the abandon which rides upon red anguish and black despair.

There is a higher unity, a social consciousness, a human solidarity based upon the Mystical Christ. It finds its true expression in the corporate conception of society where Christ is the Head! Bound to Him are individual persons, the cells of His Mystical Body; they voluntarily group themselves in a hierarchy of organs for their own benefits and for the benefits of each other. Each works for the other. All work for Christ! Society becomes Christocentric, a Christocracy.

While there are no exact blue-prints, no detailed road maps, there is an objective: the peace and order of all things in Christ. This is the ideal, the form, the law which must determine and give significance to all the activity of men. It is the spirit which binds individuals into a purposive society, leading them from the frenzied agony of defeatism, opportunism, and skepticism. In its most realistic aspect it is the concrete expression of an uncompromising Christianity's fiery power to transform all into itself. And, indeed, the sooner Christians realize their high calling, the sooner will the world "see that to the Catholic Church is reserved the definite solution of the social question; for the State, with all its legislative machinery, has not the power to solve it."⁷

When seeking the heart of social unrest, seek it in the heart of man. That is where the true and lasting answer lies. If defeatism and aimlessness is gripping

⁷ Cahill, E., *The Framework of a Christian State*, p. 256, quoting Baron von Kettler (1811-1877), Bishop of Mainz.

our nation; if we drift, not knowing whither we drift; if there is war among nations and discord among the masses, it is because individual hearts have lost their center in Christ.

Is America Decadent?

BAKER BROWNELL

Reprinted from Free America, January, 1941.

WHEN France fell many Americans found that their confidence in their own way of life had fallen, too. Was not the French way our way? Was not the casual democracy of France organically one with ours? That at least was the assumption. The stab of the bayonet into France seemed a body wound for us as well.

"Decadence!" the Nazis and others said. The word established thus hovers now with its greenish glow of putrescence over many modern conversations. France is decadent; America, and all large-scale democratic civilization, is decadent, say the Nazis, and many Americans assume that they are right. Perhaps they are indeed right. But military failure alone does not prove it. Nor should the martial morality of the Germans or of the embattled English, based purely on survival, become necessarily the standard for America.

Like many other propaganda words decadence gets its value from its shiftiness in making unannounced changes from one meaning to another. The scientist dislikes it because an unproved theory of cyclical progress and decline is often involved in the word. It is likely to assume, furthermore, a social structure that grows and declines as a unified whole, whereas society in fact seems to be a plurality of actions and attitudes in all their variegations and diverse levels of maturity.

No society would seem to be wholly decadent, nor is any society free from decadence in various spots and areas. A culture grows and rots at the same time.

The question of course is a matter of the differential. Are the rotten spots deep enough to dominate a critical situation? Does cultural decay take place faster than cultural integration? The answer depends on what is meant by decadence and what the marks of it may be. From almost any point of view there are obviously rotten spots in American life. And there are also rotten spots no doubt in Germany, Italy, England and even in the pure little countries such as Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Sweden. The scientist sees them all objectively, or at least tries to. But the scientist nevertheless should not be allowed to talk us into passionless bystanding in regard to it. That, too, in its way would be decadence.

The stigmata of rottenness vary with the observer. Many of us call anything decadent that we don't like, and even the wisest man will define it eventually in terms of his values and predispositions. And inner decline in the power and organization of a social group is the most accepted mark of decadence. Similarly a decline in numbers, in wealth, in productivity is often used as evidence of the down-grade. But this is by no means always so. In terms of power and quantities Sweden, for example, is not all she once was, but few critics would call her decadent. She seems a shining example in Europe of what is not decadent.

In the arts, morals and manners decadence has various and conflicting descriptions. Notoriously decadent eras, such as the seventeenth century in Italy, have been marked by the desire for show and shock, or as modern slang would have it, swank and punch. Originality of thought, which Carlyle said is mainly sincerity, gives way to feverish novelty and fad. The arts become displays of virtuosity. Manners become a cold, elaborate facade behind which mean and generous

souls alike are hidden. Morals, so far as they refer to social responsibility, become passionless and casual. At the same time morals as a kind of personal reciprocity with one's associates in games and duels, called "the sporting thing to do," become labored schedules of good form.

The Decadents of France and their offspring, the Symbolists—the Baudelaires, Rimbauds, Adams, Mallarmés, de Gourmonts—flaunted the name proudly. For them the grandiose vagueness of the earlier Romantics as well as the conformities and traditions of the classicists were equally a crime. They moved away from naturalism and social anecdote, away from action and descriptions of action, and approached always a more completely isolated individualism. They were rootless and sophisticated. They looked only on an inner, lonely flower. They named no things, as Mallarmé said, except as symbols of unseen realities, and they used the external word merely as a means of communicating mood and revery and reflection. Always they were in precious terror of the commonplace. They sought the new, the exotic, the bizarre, and often the horrible.

Such marks as these have been called decadent. There are many others. They are complex, conflicting; for decadence probably is no one thing but a kind of pattern or course of events in which the greatness of things before debilitates, like a fever, the things that follow.

Though decadence cannot well be defined, it is possible to get closer to the center of it. Decadence is the increasing tendency in a culture to separate feelings from their appropriate actions, and to assume that one is preparatory or auxiliary to the other. In this way the functional integrity of natural life is broken down. Normal life, granting that there is such a thing, has emotions that are aspects or functions of action. The two never are separated either in human events, or in

human consciousness. They are one indivisible form or moment of living and are irrelevant and meaningless when not associated with each other. This primeval unity of action and emotion is the mystical focus of all our living and significance.

As human culture ages, however, there is more and more a tendency to disassociate feeling from action in one field or another. In industrial life this becomes a cleavage between work and leisure, between production and consumption, with the rewards of work placed in regions beyond the work itself. Extreme specialization, division of labor, standardization, mass production, the factory system and the corporation follow. They are ways to make production, as a segregated function of life, more efficient.

In morals and religion this separatist tendency leads to a cleavage between earth and heaven, matter and spirit, body and soul, with a rigorous system of postponed values to support it. This early segregation of what life originally had put together was the industrial specialization that characterizes the present age.

In the arts this cleavage takes the form of exaggerated differences between folk art and fine art, between amateur and professional art, between the spectator or listener who buys the virtuoso who sells art. Vulgarly, or commonness becomes a reproach; yet the massive sale of the fine arts to concert audiences, museum visitors, or to wealthy patrons is about all that supports them. In the arts and in sports the fiction of vicarious appreciation is pushed and labored until it gains high prestige. Meanwhile the millions in the halls and stadia who pay others to do their art and their sport for them sit on their buttocks shivering with purchased thrills.

In manners this cleavage results in doctrines of functionless aristocracy, the social elite, the best people. Snobberies of one kind or another flourish hugely. Refinement becomes more important than good

will. Feminine niceness and masculine action are segregated in special spheres of influence. The violent city and the cultured suburb stand side by side, with the Grand Canyon of the Colorado between them.

And so it goes. In every field, now one, now another, this functional disintegration of life takes place. Though the process of specialized production, postponement of rewards, and the separation of what is called practical activity, or work, from the enjoyment of the product is of course essential in the development of any civilization, the senile culmination of this process and the institutional fixation of it is decadence.

In this complex and contradictory society called America the question of decadence cannot be answered by Yes or No. America is decadent in spots, and some of those spots are dangerous ones. But counter tendencies are vigorous and powerful. If we have our sophisticates and faddists in music, we have also our jazz, our millions dancing, our thousands of children's bands and orchestras. If we have our T. S. Eliot in poetry, we have our Sandburg, Jeffers, Lindsay and our thousands of amateurs. If we have our imitators and importers in architecture, we have also our Frank Lloyd Wright, our honest builders, our brilliant machine designers. If we have rotten cities with the manners and customs that go with them, we have also the millions who are in revolt against the cities or who never have accepted their pattern of life in the first place. Currents and counter-currents, decadence and wild health, senility and youth are side by side.

But the picture all in all is not very bright. Though America is probably less decadent in its essential patterns than any other great society, that is no reassurance nor a reason for cheer. Decadence is an inner problem of our changing culture and our modern world. It will wax or wane for reasons that are largely matters of inner context, character and the cultural vitality of our people.

Agriculture and the World Crisis

JOHN LAFARGE, S.J.

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THE quest for unity is a deep and elemental urge of human nature. It is the ultimate cause of revolution, yet it has brought men back, in the last few years, to recall the need of social institutions from which for a time, at least, they believed they could dispense themselves.

The family, manual labor, the cultivation and the inhabitation of the soil, discipline in the home and in education, cooperation between private owners, producers or consumers, collaboration or organic relations between the various parts of industrial or other economic units—all those things for which the Catholic Rural Life movement has been contending all these long years have been coming back into recognition.

Home production, as opposed to indiscriminate mass production even of simple and ordinary necessities; together with wide distribution of property, have come to the fore of late through the Decentralist movement in Great Britain and America.

When the National Catholic Rural Life Conference was first founded, few could have anticipated such a return to reality. If we analyze the restoration, we find that underlying it is the sense that *order must be a part of unity*. The total breakdown of the proletarian or socialistic movement for unity opened men's eyes to the fact that unity in human affairs was not just something which could be manufactured by piling units upon units, as we pile bricks upon bricks. Unity has not only an existence, it has a being, a structure.

It does not merely happen, but it is born and develops as a living thing. It has its own laws, intricate and marvelous like the laws of the human body. Parts depend upon parts and members depend upon the head. There is a living interplay of forces and network of responsibilities.

In a word, unity, to be true unity must be an organism, it must be organic unity. There must be diversity, authority and varied responsibility along with equality and brotherhood.

We all know the confusion that was caused in the minds of believing Christians when the cause of liberty and free institutions was passionately espoused by men who hated God and religion and sought to destroy Christianity under the guise of defending freedom. Today a new danger is added to the old. The cause of unity, order and stability is likewise espoused by men who are hostile to Christianity or are closely allied to systems which attack the Christian religion. The Church has fought for the family, for rural life, for the dignity of manual labor, for stability, order and authority against the dissolving influence of the modern State, which educates men away from all these things. She has fought for them against the irreligious movements of the times, which demanded that all these forms and institutions should be done away with and nothing should come between the millions of absolutely equalized individuals and the almighty, centralized expression of the collective will.

The new totalitarian systems still exert their power as the almighty, centralized expression of the collective will. But they wish to restore, or claim that they wish to restore, all the intermediaries between the individual and that central authority. All that the earlier revolutions sought to sweep away they wish to restore, in the name of national or racial unity. They find man simply cannot continue to exist, much less to progress or to defend himself, unless he preserves intact the

family, as the source of population, the practice of manual toil, the cooperative and corporative system in his economy, the proper hierarchy of authority and order. It sees that no urban-centered civilization can expect to survive. No longer can we ignore the claims of the family, the deep rumblings of an ever-increasing depopulation, the vital importance of a family economy, the need of organic collaboration between all economic factors at home and abroad. We recognize this as we have also learned that no nation can endure which grinds down the worker and denies his rights. Voices within the Church contribute to this awakening but voices from without the Church are contributing to it as well. We who for years have breasted a world tide begin to find the tide turning and we welcome the turn.

This, however, is not a matter for unmixed rejoicing. We welcome the fact that some grievous illusions have been dispelled, but we still recognize the drive for unity which has swept away these illusions can likewise impose a new slavery which, in turn, will lead to further destruction of our social institutions.

The question, therefore, before us is not just the simple matter of judging in favor of rural life and all that it represents in the way of family economy, decentralization, social unity, organic social and political structure, and so on. We are confronted by something much deeper and more fundamental; upon what shall this return to social unity and to the realities of man's existence be founded? It cannot be founded upon a new type of collectivism, a Fascist or Nazi collectivism, to take the place of the old. We cannot suffer the prophets of the new order to steal our newly restored social institutions and make them the handmaids of a socialized state.

Shall we restore rural life and then discover that our farms are merely to supply food for a predatory government? Shall we too bring back the family to its proper physical and social surroundings and then

discover its children are to be raised to furnish material for wars of conquest or to work for the enrichment of dictators?

Shall we wake from the nightmare of disunity and separation into the happy vision of unity, only to find that this unity itself is but an illusion, that the only unifying force it possesses is the will of a dominant majority, who hold down by force all those whom they conceive to be natural-born slaves?

If we do this, we shall destroy with the one hand the harvest that we have sown with the other. A brief and illusory unity and stability shall have been gained at the expense of human liberty. Our flight from one type of idol will have thrown us into the arms of another Moloch, quite akin to him whom we first abhorred. In the end all that we once possessed shall have perished, our order and unity quite as well as our liberty and natural rights.

There is only one answer to such a query. Our program of rural restoration, with its concomitants of unity, stability and organic decentralization, must be founded upon the sole rock upon which any society may be built in our days. In accordance with the earnest and solemn teaching of our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, it must acknowledge a universal norm of reality—above all governments, above all private or corporate interests, above all allegiances of section or race; and it must accord full recognition to the adequate concept of the human person as taught by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus, and thus alone, can the extremes in human society be harmonized in one constructive whole: liberty and authority, order and freedom, progress and tradition, discipline and self-expression; unity and diversity of persons, peoples and ideas.

The problem that will increasingly confront the world is how to keep an organic society against the terrific pressure of the revolutionary State, such a

State which organizes a society after its own liking yet sets nation against nation and race against race. In the words of Alfred Rosenberg, prophet of National Socialism, the new State is like a sponge, absorbing everything.

The resistance to this pressure will come not from the governments and political parties, not from the wealthy and their special interests. It will come from the millions of the poor and the humble who will build up their own economy from the very soil which they till.

The task of preserving our democracy rests upon the Rural-Life movement in the United States because it is precisely in the field of all those things for which the Rural-Life movement stands—family life, organic unity of society—that the subtlest attacks upon democracy will be made in our time.

Democracy will be saved, human unity achieved, not by the government which lavishes most material benefits nor by the creation of the most successful farmers, but by the government which pays homage to God's law above all human institutions and by the farmer who can see beyond his own immediate, material interest to the good of every single human being with whom he can possibly come into relationship.

The wall of defense that lies between our social institutions and the slavery, the moral degradation, the total ruin which red and brown Bolshevism bring in their wake is not the wealth of the nation nor the scientific ingenuity of our professional agriculturists. The Nation's wealth is a precious gift from God and the skill of our scientists and our economists is an instrument to be proud of. But the wealth can be squandered and the knowledge made the tool of evil schemes. Our wall of defense is the charity and wisdom of men who put the love of Christ and of all men without exception in Christ before all gain or merely personal considerations. Such men may own no ready formula

for bettering their own earthly condition but they possess the secret for bettering the condition in time and in eternity of the generations to come.

Did the building of human unity depend on man's generosity alone, we should be discouraged. But it does not so depend. Beneath all the calamities of the time is the tranquil unfolding through the ages of the eternal mystery in Christ, which is forever pushing mankind on despite ourselves to the goal of Christ's Kingdom of justice, holiness, peace and love. Our task is to measure up in some fashion not to the greatness of man's age but of the age of God: and God follows no clock or calendar. He knows no human tempo and is ruled by no earthly boundaries.

If the Catholic Rural Life Conference can see, as has long been its goal, ten thousand rural parishes in this Nation with Christ's love as their bond and Christ's Person as their leader, there will be no crisis, national or international, for the United States of America.

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In a recent speech the Pope complained that his "voice is not listened to"; so that people, who blame the Pope for his silence, only forget what he said, and that for the results achieved, he might just as well have spoken to a deaf and dumb asylum. Besides, what Cardinal Bourne once said about bishops, is equally true of Popes, whose actions are so often criticized: "As regards the need for confidence, a bishop is frequently misunderstood. He has constantly to take action based on knowledge of which he is absolutely sure but which in charity and as a duty of conscience he can communicate to no living soul. With such knowledge he has to act; and unless he has the confidence of the people he will certainly be misunderstood and will have to leave the clearing of the misunderstanding to God and then to the confidence of his friends."—*Canon Jackman.*

Some Things New and Old

HYPNOTISM

WHAT is the attitude of the Church towards Hypnotism, asks a medical student. Has the Church condemned Hypnotism; is it forbidden to Catholics to be concerned in any way in Hypnotism?

Officially and formally, the Church does not appear to have condemned Hypnotism, except in so far as it may be a form of superstition. But, on the other hand, the most eminent moral theologians have had a great deal to say about Hypnotism.

The foundation of Hypnotism is that the patient gives over the control of his will to the hypnotizer, and it is forbidden to renounce one's will and place it under the control of another. Then, again, it is against Christian morals for anyone to dabble in things of this sort out of idle and improper curiosity; just as it is forbidden to indulge in spiritist seances and other occult fantasies.

But there appears to be a general agreement among moral theologians that Hypnotism for a therapeutic or curative purpose is not forbidden, given proper circumstances. Since the influence of Hypnotism extends only to functional disorders of the nervous system, its use may be employed in such instances.

So it seems that when the hypnotist is a qualified and conscientious physician or psychologist; when the proper moral precautions are taken and all danger of abuse is excluded; then, for a proper medical and curative purpose Hypnotism may lawfully be used. But, and the theologians are insistent on this, both for the sake of the hypnotist and the patient, one or more witnesses should be present when the hypnotic state is induced.

Hence, for a good cause and with the proper safeguards, the opinion of Catholic Moralists leans to the belief that Hypnotism may be made use of strictly within the limits laid down.

AGNUS DEI

I see by the newspapers—says a high-school student—that the other day Pope Pius XII blessed six thousand Agnus Deis. What is the Agnus Dei, and what is its significance?

The Agnus Dei is a small piece of wax, shaped like a medal, blessed with very great solemnity by the Pope in person. The wax from which the Agnus Dei is fashioned is commonly supposed to be the remains of the Paschal candle; and the solemn blessing, which historically took place on the Wednesday of Easter week, was usually performed by any Pope only twice—in the first and seventh years of his Pontificate.

The history of the Agnus Dei is very ancient, and they are found as far back as the ninth century. The custom was for the Archdeacon of Rome to prepare the wax disks, mixing with them the Holy Chrism. But today the preparation of the disks is entrusted to Cistercian monks. These sacred emblems, which are of the nature of a sacramental, were consecrated on Wednesday after Easter but were not distributed until the following Saturday. There was a Solemn Mass at which the Pope assisted, and after the Agnus Dei of the Mass, the Pope placed a small package of the disks into the inverted mitres of each Cardinal and Bishop who approached to receive them.

There is quite a deal of ecclesiastical legislation surrounding the Agnus Dei. For instance, by a Bull of Pope Gregory XIII, all persons are forbidden, under pain of excommunication, to gild or paint any Agnus Dei consecrated by the Pope. Enclosed in an elaborate case, the Agnus Dei was frequently sent by the Pope as a gift to sovereigns and princes. Under the penal laws of Elizabeth, it was a felony to bring an Agnus Dei into England. The Agnus Dei takes its name from the image of the Lamb of God which is imprinted on each disk.